

[A Change of Vocation Brings Success]

Life story

A CHANGE OF VOCATION BRINGS SUCCESS

A Depression Victim Story

Research by: Mrs. Daisy Thompson

Augusta

Edited by: Mrs. Leila H. Harris

Supervising Editor

Georgia Writers' Project

Area 7 March 1940

(?). J. Lefferhan,

Restaurateur

647 Broad St.

March 20, 1940.

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One of Augusta's swankiest eating places represents a spectacular come-back by John Farrell, one of the town's pioneer restaurateurs. In his own words: "It has been far beyond

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my expectations. However, it has been a most interesting experience all the way through and it has taught me much.

“My ups and downs have been very similar to all others who have tried to maintain restaurants during the trying years of the economic recession. Things just kept going from bad to worse until all resources were exhausted and the doors had to be closed to prevent [imminant?] disaster.

“My grandparents came to America from Ireland in 1854. My father was born three years later. My mother was originally a Protestant, but later one joined the Catholic Church. I have 3 brothers, 3 sister, and 3 half-sisters.

“All of my education, which included a commercial course, was obtained at the Catholic Brothers' School. My father was the superintendent at one of the Textile Mills at that time and he helped me to get a job at the same place.

“After working there for some time I obtained a position as bookkeeper with the Johnson Paper Mills at Marietta, Georgia. This plant manufactured wrapping paper as well as many other kinds, all of which were made from wood pulp. There was a pulp mill located about nine miles from that city.

“I stayed there for a year and then went to work for the 2 Abbott Brick and Tile Company. Then I moved back to Augusta and was employed in the Transportation Department of the Georgia Railroad Company for the next three years.

“At the end of that time I accepted a more lucrative position as Division Rate Clerk with the Southern Railroad.

“In 1904 I married Mary Vinson Arnold, who had moved to Augusta from Savannah as a very small child. All of her education was obtained here also. We have seven children, four girls, and three boys.

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"Soon after my marriage I secured a position as bookkeeper with the Brown Jewelry Company, Augusta's most prominent and successful jewelers.

I kept books for them for 13 years. Then one day an accident happened which necessitated drastic changes in my method of making a living. A heavy door closed on the forefinger of my right hand, severing it completely. This not only rendered me incapable of following my chosen vocation but it left me in a highly nervous condition which lasted for quite a long time.

"A friend of mine who was an experienced restaurateur asked me to go into business with him. He had built up quite an enviable reputation and we enjoyed a splendid patronage for about two years. We called our place Peacock's Restaurant and made sea foods for specialty. The business venture represented an original investment of \$19,000.00

"After a couple of years Mr. Peacock, who was getting old, sold his half interest to me and retired to his country estate.

"Then I became associated in business with Mr. Walder, who was also an experienced restaurant man. For the following several years we operated a very prosperous business.

"At this time the World War was on and Camp Hancock had been established at Augusta. The soldiers furnished us a very flattering patronage and we also enjoyed the cream of the city's trade. We catered to the very best people and served the finest foods obtainable. We secured excellent prices for our service and our profits were most gratifying.

"During 1919, which was our very best year, gross sales amounted to \$120,000.00. We realized a net profit of \$37,000.00, after Government, State, City, County, and various other taxes had been paid.

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"Prices on all commodities were very high during the war and salaries increases accordingly. Trade was exceptionally good in all lines of business and for quite some time we operated a thriving business.

"About 1921 prices began to drop but we still maintained the same salary standards as we had in our banner years. Money came in slowly in 1920 and 1923 and profits for the next decade amounted to about \$5000 per annum. During this time our receipts decreased from \$300 to about [250?] per day.

"In 1929 this whole section was flooded and all crops in adjacent [viciatities?] suffered considerable damage. Due to the 4 high water damage, cotton dropped to 10 cents a pound.

"War prices on cotton ranged as high as 40 cents a pound. Cottonseed oil was very high and pork loins sold for 40 cents a pound. As strange as it may seem milk is higher now than it was during the World War. This of course, is due to government control. Beef, also, is almost as high now as in that time of inflated prices. The government can't be blamed for this, however, as it was purely providential, being brought about by the disastrous drought experienced throughout the West. In its wake many (?) died because the country was left entirely without grazing and water facilities. The market was thus deprived of a great percentage of its normal beef output.

"This serious situation [hecassitated?] government intervention, with the result that vast numbers of cows were shipped to the South and East. (?) of these died [arrouse?]. Those that finally reached their destinations were extremely thin and unfit for market purposes. Others were sent to pastures in various parts of the country to be fattened and slaughtered for canning in various government established canneries in different sections of the country. The beef (?) canned was distributed to Relief Clients through Surplus Commodity Warehouses.

"While you have been talking, Mr. Farrell," I interrupted, "I have been wondering how the high price of cottonseed oil affected your business.

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"Well!" he explained. "Restaurants use great quantities of cottonseed oil for cooking purposes. It is also used in a great many other ways. For instance, in mayonnaise, salad oils, etc.

"Forty years ago." He continued. "Farmers threw away the seeds out of their cotton, frequently using them to fill ditches and washouts on their land. However, it didn't take them very long to learn the great value of cottonseed as a fertilizer. Soon they were making compost of them, mixing the seeds with acid and decayed vegetation.

"So you see, that prices, high or low, affect us all regardless of the kind of business we operate. It is indeed a true saying that none of us each live to ourselves.

"In 1928 my partner died. I carried on the business for several years but then the depression came on in full blast causing such a curtailment of business that I was forced to close my doors and seek more lucrative employment.

"Fortunately, before very long I secured some government work which kept me busy for the next eighteen months. At the end of that time I had retrieved my losses sufficiently to open another restaurant.

"Certainly the World War was the primary cause of the economic depression, but I believe there were other contributing factors. During the war period when money flowed freely, people were agog with excitement and spent money lavishly. Later on they seemed to become absolutely reckless and those who formerly had known only the bare necessities of life now bought luxuries. Then the depression came with its resultant panic.

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"When Americans were taken from their jobs and sent to France, many vacancies were created which were filled immediately by women, both married and single, and even young girls. When the boys came back there were very few openings and these were not sufficiently remunerative to warrant raising families. Consequently there has been a startling decrease in the number of marriages and in the birth record. I believe in early marriages and large families which in my opinion would go a long way toward solving our economic problems.

"As I told you, my paternal grandfather came to America in 1854. He went to work in the Georgia Railroad shops as a car inspector. At that time this position carried with it a salary of \$125.00 a month. Today the same job pays \$140.00 a month and a bookkeeper makes about \$75.00. The only way I can account for the difference is that women have never entered the car inspector field, while the market is overrun with woman bookkeepers.

"I am firmly of the opinion." He stated emphatically. "That a woman's place, except where it is absolutely necessary for her to make a living, is in the home. There are many girls working in stores and in offices who do not need the money, but who work for very small salaries to obtain the luxuries they couldn't afford otherwise.

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"I can see very little difference in the cost of living now and before the World War, but I believe the low prices of some commodities offset the high prices of others. Of course certain articles are more expensive. For instance, silk stockings and cosmetics. I estimate that such of my daughters spends from five to six dollars a month for her hose. I believe it costs more to maintain a girl from her knees down and her shoulders up, than it does to clothe her body. A few years ago women folk washed and curled their hair at home. Now, the beauty shops are full practically all the time."

"After having reared a large family, Mr. Farrell," I asked. "How would you say the morals of the young people of today compare with those of a few years ago."

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"Well, I believe their morals are just as good as ever and their ideals are equally as high, but they are much more frank and natural - not so mid-victorian.

"The ever increasing number of divorces is deplorable." He went on. "Tax laws are responsible for them to a great extent, but selfishness is also a dominant factor. There seems to be an inability to adapt one's self to conditions and an unwillingness to make concessions in order to keep the home intact.

"I do not believe wars will cease and peace come to the world again until the Pope's ideas for its restoration are carried out.

"Our children have had the best we could afford in the way of education and all of them are a credit to us.

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As you know one of our boys is in the insurance business here and another practices law. Two of our girls also hold positions here and a third is teaching Occupational Therapy at Providence, Rhode Island, after having charge of temporarily mental defective and acute alcoholic patients at Baltimore, Maryland. Our youngest son is still studying at the University of Georgia.

"No, I have never traveled abroad but I have seen quite a bit of our own country. I have been in practically every state east of the Mississippi."

"Well, Mr. Farrell," I said, "After hearing all you have told us I agree with you that at one time you were really caught in the depression and at a loss how to make a new start. However, as one looks at this very up-to-date place you now have, you seem to have found an excellent way out."

"You are right." He said with pardonable pride. "After I once gained a foothold my success was beyond my greatest expectations. But I do really try to please my patrons and give

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them not only the very best foods obtainable but also see that they have the ultimate in service.

“While I was doing the government work I told you about, I was always on the alert for something more [resunerative?]. I gave the matter much consideration before I decided to make another venture into the business world. Finally I was convinced that with my experience I could again make good and I opened at my 9 present location.

“I am sure my past experience has been beneficial in a great many ways. I have learned how to overcome many obstacles that obstruct the way to success. Should these conditions which caused by failure return at some future time, I shall be much better fitted to meet the pitfalls peculiar to the restaurant business. Perhaps the greatest lesson was that a period of high prices will certainly be followed by falling prices and failing business. I am firmly of the opinion that each of us should exercise great care in building up a reserve capital against a possible return of the economic depression.